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# Review of “Pragmatism, Old and New”

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## Book Review

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*Pragmatism, Old and New*. Susan Haack, editor; Robert Lane, associate editor. Prometheus Books, 2006. 741 pages. Hardcover \$32.00 ISBN 1-59102-359-9.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Arthur Lovejoy claimed there were thirteen (at least) varieties of pragmatism. More recently, Joseph Margolis has remarked that the philosophical concerns, commitments, methods, and goals of the “Big Three” classical American pragmatists – Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey – were different enough, even at times antithetical enough, from each other that it is a stretch to call them all pragmatists or to see any fecund core to pragmatism. Peirce notoriously chose to adopt the term “pragmaticism” for his views so as to avoid their conflation or association with the views of others who used the label of “pragmatism.” Decades later Richard Rorty returned the compliment when he said that the only real contribution to pragmatism by Peirce was that he provided its name.

Nevertheless, there have been various attempts over the years to enunciate, if not defining the constitutive characteristics of pragmatism, at least common threads. One such attempt that is often cited was provided by Richard Bernstein, who identified five aspects of the “pragmatist ethos” in his 1992 book, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity*: (1) antifoundationalism (the view that truth has no ultimate ground), (2) a thorough fallibilism (an understanding that every belief, no matter how fundamental, is open to further interpretation and criticism), (3) a social view of the self and the need to nurture a critical community of inquirers, (4) an awareness and sensitivity to radical contingency and chance that mark the universe, our inquiries, our lives, (5) an understanding of the importance of plurality, a plurality of traditions, perspectives, philosophical orientations.

Haack’s new book, *Pragmatism, Old and New*, is the latest of a number of pragmatism anthologies over the past half century, including Milton Konvitz and Gail Kennedy’s *The American Pragmatists* (1960), Amelie Rorty’s *Pragmatic Philosophy* (1966), H.S. Thayer’s *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings* (1982), Louis Menand’s *Pragmatism: A Reader* (1997), and John Stuhr’s *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy* (2000). This present volume is a collection of thirty-three primary readings sandwiched between an introduction and epilogue by Haack. While Haack does not specify which authors are the “old” pragmatists and which are the “new,” it is safe to say that besides the “Big Three” of Peirce, James, and Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Ferdinand C. S. Schiller would be included among the “old.” These five authors constitute twenty-four of the thirty-three readings and almost 500 of the 700 pages of readings. Of these twenty-four essays, nine are by Peirce (approximately 150 pages), five by James (110 pages), seven by Dewey (130 pages), two by Mead (20 pages) and one by Schiller (23 pages). The “new” pragmatists include F. P. Ramsey (one essay, five pages), C. I. Lewis (one essay, twelve pages), Sidney Hook (one essay, 30 pages), Morton White (one essay, fifteen pages), Willard Quine (one

essay, 24 pages), Nelson Goodman, one essay, 20 pages), Hilary Putnam (one essay, twelve pages), and Richard Rorty (two essays, 40 pages). Haack's introduction provides not merely a survey and summary of the book's essays, but also a spirited commentary of what she sees as the unfortunate transmutation from "the reformed scientific philosophy developed by C. S. Peirce to the revolutionary, literary post-philosophy urged by Richard Rorty" (p. 15). This commentary is extended and amplified in her epilogue, "'We Pragmatists...': Peirce and Rorty in Conversation." This imaginary conversation consists of selected quoted passages from Peirce and Rorty, structured as a running dialogue on various topics, including "truth, rationality, nominalism versus realism, representation, the status of metaphysics, the role of logic, the relation of philosophy to science and to literature, meaning and metaphor, the life of the mind, and the interpretation of pragmatism" (p. 675). As can be expected from the tone and content of Haack's introduction, she sees striking differences between Peirce and Rorty, clearly favoring Peirce's views.

The value of this volume will differ depending upon who reads it. As a survey of the history of pragmatism, it is quite fine. It contains many classic papers that one would expect and hope to find anthologized (and, indeed, that one often does find anthologized), such as Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," James' "What Pragmatism Means," Dewey's "The Construction of the Good," Mead's "The Social Self," etc. This is true of the papers representative of the "new" pragmatists, as well; e.g., Lewis' "A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori," White's "The Analytic and the Synthetic: An Untenable Dualism," Quine's "Natural Kinds," Rorty's "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationality." More importantly – since the above papers are common philosophical currency – this volume contains less renowned papers that demonstrate the breadth and depth of pragmatism; e.g., Peirce's "On Logic Machines," Dewey's "Truth and Consequences," Ramsey's "Belief, Truth, and Inference, Hook's "Naturalism and First Principles." For someone not versed in the history of pragmatism, then, this is a very fine compilation of papers. Those already familiar with the history of pragmatism will also benefit by the inclusion of some of the lesser-known papers (some just noted). There is one drawback (at least for this reviewer) of this anthology, though it is one of omission, not commission. That drawback is that it is not always clear in what immediate philosophical context(s) the various papers appeared. For example, Bertrand Russell wrote a number of essays critiquing and challenging James and Dewey on issues such as truth, meaning, and logic. A fuller presentation of such a context would provide a richer understanding and appreciation of the pragmatists' papers that are included here. Given a volume of over 700 pages already, however, it is understandable that more could not be included. Another omission – though, again, an understandable one – is that no contemporary continental thinkers who embrace pragmatism are included here, such as Karl-Otto Apel or Jürgen Habermas. Some readers (though not this reviewer) will no doubt object to Haack's interpretation and evaluation of the perceived shift in what pragmatism means and champions. For example, in the epilogue, while Rorty is not quite Peirce's whipping boy, he certainly is "bested" in this debate disguised as a conversation. Despite these minor concerns, this is, overall, a fine, fruitful anthology, with substantive commentary by its editor.

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